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Conference Abstract

Expanding Access: Reflections on the French Translation of Darwin Core

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Abstract

The Darwin Core (DwC) standard (Darwin Core Maintenance Group 2023) is the most extensively adopted vocabulary maintained by the Biodiversity Information Standards (TDWG), with over 3.5 billion published records since its official ratification in 2009. TDWG strives to promote equitable participation in biodiversity informatics by participating in and facilitating broader internationalization initiatives, including making standards accessible to non-English-speaking communities. The initial comprehensive translation of the Darwin Core Terms documentation, as well as the Establishment Means Controlled Vocabulary, Degree of Establishment Controlled Vocabulary and the Pathway Controlled Vocabulary were finalized and published in the French language in May 2025. The translation was done using the Crowdin platform*[1] and can be accessed on the official Darwin Core website*[2]. This endeavor offered a comprehensive view of the translation process, highlighting lessons learned along the way and leading to recommendations for similar efforts in the future. Some other questions are still unanswered to this day and will require further discussions, such as the treatment of deprecated terms, or finding the most effective method for integrating translations into the ongoing maintenance workflows of standards.

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In contrast to standards that were recently ratified such as Latimer Core (Saliba et al. (2025)), Darwin Core's extensive legacy use and maturity present specific translation challenges. During the translation process, questions emerged about adapting the language to enhance clarity and inclusivity. For French in particular, questions around linguistic purism arose, as the use of anglicisms is variable among different francophone communities. Strict translation practices might suggest avoiding borrowed terms, but privileging terminology already unanimously established in professional communities leads to pragmatic compromises to foster usability and adoption. An example is the term 'standard' itself, which should be translated as *norme* (e.g., *une norme ISO*), but that doesn't reflect the current usage of French biodiversity information scientists who use the transparent and equally possible *standard* (e.g., *le standard Darwin Core du TDWG*) instead. In other cases, if an official wording is used in regulatory or governmental contexts (such as *espèces envahissantes*, see for example Comité français de l'IUCN and Office Français de la Biodiversité (2023)), it was preferred over the alternative community-used anglicism (*espèces invasives*), as a way to reflect the normative nature of standards.

French expressions are often more verbose than their English counterparts. In response, translators must balance fidelity with conciseness, occasionally rephrasing or adapting rather than rendering terms word-for-word to preserve the clarity and economy required in technical vocabularies. This is proving to be a particular challenge for the Humboldt extension, which is currently being translated. For example, the literal translation of the label 'Is Degree of Establishment Scope Fully Reported' becomes the fairly verbose label *Est-ce que le Champs d'Application du Degré d'Implantation est Entièrement Répertorié* .

Ensuring that TDWG standards are available in French is essential to broaden participation from underrepresented communities across Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and beyond. By lowering language barriers, the biodiversity informatics community can foster inclusivity, enhance data sharing, and strengthen global stewardship of biodiversity knowledge.

Keywords

data standards, documentation, language, controlled vocabulary

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Endnotes

*1 https://crowdin.com/

*2 https://dwc.tdwg.org/fr/